AMERICA IN FRANCE

III---Toul

When American communiqués began to take their place in the daily official chronicle of the war along with French and British, the georgraphical spot to which they made most insistent reference was a city that was, and still is about 16 kilometers from the line. "The sector northwest of Toul" became overnight the one definite point springing out of a maze of "somewheres" and "with the American troops" upon which as eager nation, through its hearts and atlases, could fasten its hopes—and by proxy its eyes.

"The sector northwest of Toul" might well be entitled to fame for that reason alone. But it has an even stronger claim, one that will win for it the honor of a specific date in every American history written henceforth. The fact has never before been announced, but it was on January 19, 1918, in the sector northwest of Toul, that the first American troops entered the line, not to further their training in trench warfare, but, already trained, to become part and parcel of the chain of freemen welded in unbroken links between the North Sea and the Swiss border.

The schoolbooks will mention the date, and either say themselves, or leave it to the reader to imagine, that January 19, 1918, was a typical midwinter day in a winter all too like the American variety. Actually, it was a bit of April strayed into January.

Antedates Gallo-Roman Days

Thus was another milestone set up in the history of a city whose career, by no means hitherto uneventful, had had its beginnings in a past that antedated the clash of Gaul and Roman for domination of the land that was to be France—a city whose fame was renewed as late as 1870. For there are still ancient Toulois—and they need not be so very ancient—who can tell you of those heartbreaking days when their city's all insufficient garrison held the Prussian at bay until his guns and his fires raised such havoc within it that it was only the shell of a citadel which he entered just three weeks after the disaster of Sedan.

The comparative tranquility in which Toul had existed for the 1500 years or so previous to 1870 it owed probably wholly to its redoubtable strategic position on the eastern frontier of Lorraine. It was a great prize like a proud beauty; but, also like a proud beauty, it was a prize to be fought for, but not to be brought itself into the scuffle.

Toul, with the river Moselle to the south and the Marne-Rhine canal, wide as a river at that point, at the north, lies at the southern apex of an almost equilateral triangle whose inverted base line runs between Verdun and Metz. It is linked to Verdun by an unbroken series of fortifications that follow the natural defense formed by the heights of the Meuse, dominating the plain of the Woevre, or Voivre. It is itself a fortress of the first class, and while its leading industry in recent times has been the manufacture of earthenware, its casernes, arsenals, magazines and parade grounds far outnumber its potteries.

Seats of the Three Bishops

The Metz-Verdun-Toul triangle, however, is notable not alone for its importance on the strategic map of Europe in two great modern wars. It was there three cities which formed, when the dark sun of the Middle Ages was setting, three closely linked bishoprics that represented so powerful an alliance that they were called the Seats of the Three Bishops, with capital letters, as though there were no other three bishops that counted for anything in all Christendom.

If the distinction had been purely a reward for piety, Toul would have well deserved it. For it was Christian in the fourth century, a date not so very far removed, in the dwindling perspective of time, from the days when Rome itself was a pagan capital.

It was not until the beginning of the decline of Charlemagne's descendants that Toul began to play a distinctive role in the struggle for continental supremacy. In the tenth century it formed part of Lotharingia, the kingdom of Lothair, son of Charlemagne, and the modern Lorraine. So it was that it became part of the German Empire, which was scarcely the German Empire of today.

But the bishop was still supreme. The German Empire meant nothing to him, just as it probably means nothing to the Bishop of Nancy and Toul—to use his exact title—of this day. He coined his own money, and his citadel was an empire unto itself.

In the 13th century the city obtained a measure of self-rule—not, however, enough to satisfy the Toulois, who in 1300 sought and won the protection of Philip le Bel, a ruler of whom little is known beyond his great personal beauty and his kingly cruelty toward ecclesiastical—and therefore political—offenders.

Definitely French in 1552

Toul became definitely French in 1552, when Henry II entered the city, and the treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648 formally recognized its incorporation, as well as that of Alsace, into the kingdom of France.

For the next two centuries and more Toul lived its life, fought the wars of France and watched the Moselle flow by without getting into the limelight of contemporary events. But if it had never been heard of before August 16, 1870, it flamed into renown in the vivid days that followed with a brilliance which alone would insure it a place in the chronicles of world freedom.

It was on that day that the advancing Prussian hosts first attacked the city. Probably they expected the little garrison to fight a rearguard action and hurry on westward under cover of darkness. The garrison stood firm. It numbered only 2290 poorly equipped, meagerly trained men, but they held off the troops of the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg until September 23—just a month and a week later—when a murderous bombardment and raging fires throughout the city cleared the way for the conqueror's entry.

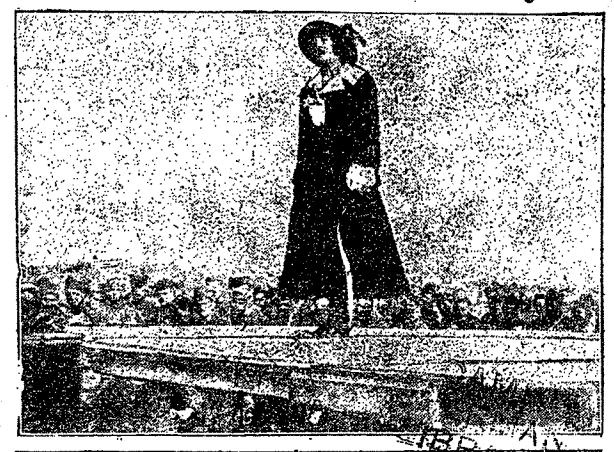
What a Handful of Men Did

It was thus one of the first places to be besieged in the Franco-Prussian war. The siege was methodical as only a German operation could be. The city was completely invested. Early in September it was asked to surrender, but politely declined. The enemy lost heavily in his attempts to take it, and when big guns began the bombardment, the French, from within the city, silenced more than one battery in its attempt to lay the citadel in ruins.

Describing the surrender, an impartial English correspondent with the German Armies said: "The Prussian officers were furious because a handful of men had been able to block the road to Paris for six weeks."

It was as though the citizens of Greater Punxsatawney, Penn., had held up a vast army marching on New York.

ELSIE AT THE FRONT



1815—1918

(Not at all like "The Men Who Fought at Minden")

The men that fought at Waterloo were togged out fit to kill
With plumes and gilded shakoes, and every sort of frill
Was on their gaudy tunics, and up and down their pants
Ran gaudy stripes—but that is not the way We look in France!

The men that fought at Waterloo wore gilded high-heeled shoes;
They'd had a dance the night before, and had no time to lose
In getting out of Brussels, so they didn't stop to change.
Small chance we'd stand dressed up like that, if Fritzy got the range!

The men that fought at Waterloo had pipe-clay on their belts,
And, if they didn't clean 'em, they got cat-o'-nine-tails' welts
Upon their bloomin' carcasses—we suffer no such thing;
Our belts are drab, our welts are all from vaccine or from bing!

The men that fought at Waterloo had not a single Ford,
Nor yet a single airplane; they just trusted in the Lord
And blazed away with open sights, and used the bayonet—
At that, they did some fighting we're not likely to forget!

The men that fought at Waterloo were mighty men and bold!
We marvel at their bravery whene'er the story's told;
For gosh! the things they didn't have, in camouflage and guns,
Would make 'em, if they scrapped today, just mince-meat for the Huns!

AROUND THE FLYING FIELD

An American aviator had been one of a score of passengers on one of the huge Handley-Page machines used by the British. He was telling his friends about it.

"Yes," he concluded, "there were 20 of us aboard—20 and a pool table."

On busy flying days, an aviation field becomes something of a No Man's Land. The airplane has not yet been perfected to the point where it can light with the ease and insouciance of a butterfly. It doesn't necessarily come down with a sickening thud but once it hits the ground it has so much pep left that it speeds along the level for a good distance before it folds its wings and is trundled in to bed. During that precise minute, an aviation field is a good place to keep off of.

A mechanician was crossing a field when a speck of a plane appeared to the east and began to loom larger and lower. He looked at it a second, then he began to run.

"Wow!" he shouted. "There's Lieutenant Soandso. When he lands, he wants the earth—and he can have it!"

The grotesque painting of airplanes developed into a fad once or twice during the war, but the individual markings brought trouble to their designers so frequently that conspicuous designs are banned at the front now.

This, however, does not stop extemporaneous decoration at the training centers, and the Americans are dabbling in the art with a sometimes elaborate brush.

"The Fish" is one of the most striking productions. The fuselage is painted to resemble the scaly body of a fish. The motor hood, appropriately painted, forms the mouth and teeth, an exhaust pipe makes an eye, the rudder the tail and the aviator's back rest the spinal fin.

Darting about in the sunlight the craft looks like a huge flying fish. By varying this scheme of decorations dragons and sea monsters are portrayed without limit.

"The Gambler" is another noteworthy craft. On its wings and fuselage have been painted playing cards and dice.

To "throw a seven" the aviator merely makes a straightaway flight disclosing on the bottom of the lower plane two dice showing a five and a two. To "throw eleven" he inverts his machine and discloses a six and five painted on the top of the upper wing.

Pinned to the bulletin board of a certain aviation squadron is this—or it was pinned there until the company clerk got wise:

NOTICE!

Jim Bowers has been promoted to the positions of First Class Private and all military honors and courtesies consistent with his station will, accordingly, be rendered.

Three American aviators were operating over the lines. Toward them, out of the nowhere of the empyrean, rushed another plane. They watched it, squinted at it, once-overed it, and finally saw, somewhat to their disappointment, that it was French.

The Frenchman, himself satisfied as to the identity of little Yankee flock, turned and disappeared.

"But if he'd found we were Boche," said one of the three in narrating the incident, "he'd have taken us all on."

Some infantrymen were marching up to the line. It was a long walk, and the roads were dusty. Overhead the hum of a motor kept coming nearer. Some of them looked up. It came nearer still, and all of them looked up.

As the plane flashed by, it was so low that they could see the Yankee pilot's gauntleted hand waving to them over the side. And the answering yell reached the aviator's ears right through the thundering drone of the propeller and the pound of the exhaust.

"How are they fighting up there?" the man who has been flying over the lines always wants to know.

He sees more of the front in a minute than the division commander does in a week; he knows when the line is advanced; he knows what's doing and how it's being done. But he doesn't know how the spirit, or morale, or just plain pep of the boys below is holding out. So he's always glad to be told.

For if he finds that the boys are as peppy as Satan's own particular imps, it makes him feel a lot peppier, too—and his isn't such a pepless job, either.

Vrille is one of the latest words to find its way into the American aviator's vocabulary. It is the French name for the most dangerous variety of tail spin. It is pronounced Vree.

A vrille is most commonly caused by what is technically known as crossing the controls. If an airplane is banked to turn to the left, for example, and the aviator swings the rudder to turn to the right, the probabilities are that the machine will go into a vrille.

The wings tip nearly to the vertical and lose their bite on the air, and the plane begins to fall with a sort of flutter and what may be termed a "cornerways glide." Once in this position, it is out of control.

The only way to right a machine from a vrille is to shut off the engine and throw the controls into neutral. Then it rights itself. A vrille also may be caused by attempting to turn sharply without first banking.

Of all positions a plane can get into, a vrille is the most dangerous. At low altitude a flyer has little opportunity to right himself.

Conditions at one aviation instruction center aren't so serious as at one inspection of a Mexican army when a battalion mustered one colonel, five majors, nine captains and two privates, but there are so many officers around that the enlisted men—and the officers, too, for that matter—get "arm sore" from saluting.

An order has been issued providing that officers training and awaiting instruction will not wear their Sam Browne belts and insignia except in the evenings and when going away from camp.

Thus the difficulty has been solved.

NOT A PASSING ONE

"How did you get to know Lieutenant Blank?"

"Oh, he and I crossed on the same boat. He came over ahead of his outfit, you know."

"Ah, I see! Then he's what you might call a casual acquaintance?"

THE SCISSORS VS. THE PEN

BEING A HANDY CLASSIFICATION OF THE INNUMERABLE VARIETIES OF A.E.F. CENSORS

(This pamphlet was prepared by an unreserved buck who joined the colors to make the w. s. for d., but remained to have his innermost thoughts cut to hellandone by a lot of Reserve Shavetails—such as the one that wrote in here not long ago about the correspondents of the A.E.F.)

1.—Lieutenant Ogleburg is stricter than a Sunday school superintendent with a lot of young folks out on the annual picnic. He learned the censorship regulations by heart when they were first issued, and they have grown in on him. The way he wants you to write letters he doesn't want to have your family or your girls know you're in the Army at all, or that there's a war going on. If you write about going on guard he says you mustn't say that you do two hours on and four hours off. He probably figures it out that if the Germans knew that they'd lam over a lot of shells from an airplane just the time the relief was going around.

2.—Lieutenant Plattsdan is even worse. Besides clipping the military stuff out of your letters—thus raising bob with the stuff on the other side—he takes it into his hands to correct your grammar, to dot your i's and cross your t's for you. That might come in handy if you were writing to a professor or somebody that was educated, but if you're writing to a girl what good does it do you? Besides, the only chance a soldier has to be sloppy, to give his mind rest and not bother about being correct is when he's writing letters; so why not let him go the limit?

3.—Lieutenant Uphank has a trick of refusing to cut things out but calling you into his billet, showing you what's wrong or what he thinks is wrong, and then asking you to re-write it with the hush-stuff left out. He says that's by far the better way, because then the folks when they get your letters don't think they're being cheated out of any inside dope on the war, but believe they're getting all there is to be got. But the result is that you never get round to rewriting the letter and the first thing you know you get a letter from you're old man wanting to know why the hell you don't write.

4.—Lieutenant Yap-Devens has one main hip on censoring the criticism of superior officers. To give an illustration Bill Bromley, in my shack, was rushing the same girl I was back in the States, and I didn't know how to come back at him. Finally I wrote to the girl's married sister and said that Bill was a big cheese. The first thing I knew the Loot had me on the carpet. "What for?" says I. "Criticism of superior officer," says he. It seems I'd forgot all along that Bill was a first-class private!

5.—Lieutenant Dix is a suspicious son-of-a-gun. If you throw any French phrases—even innocent ones like *cognac*—into a letter, just to let the girl know you're making progress with the language and customs of the country, he calls you in and wants to know where you got it. I always thought a censor was supposed to be like a father confessor; that he wouldn't give you away no matter what a lot of stuff you told him—but not so. He says that all mail matter written in a foreign language can't be handled by him, but has got to go down to the base censor. Result: I can't practice up writing what little French I know, and have the fun of showing it off. Just as if the lieutenant didn't have brains enough to translate *cognac*.

6.—But Lieutenant Lee-Meade is the best one of the bunch. I'm his orderly, so he knows me well enough to know I don't know anything, much less any military information, and couldn't spell the name of the town we're in, much less pronounce it. So when I hand him a letter of mine he says, "Sure there isn't any rough stuff in that?" "Sure, lieutenant," says I. "Sure now?" he says, "because if there is they'll be coming back on me." "There isn't a thing I wouldn't tell my own mother," says I (the letter being written to her). So he says "Awri," and puts his John Hancock on the last page and on the envelope and off she goes in time to catch the afternoon mail load. If there were more loots like him there'd be a lot more letters written in the A.E.F.